





















# MAIL SUPPLEMENT TO THE HONGKONG DAILY PRESS.

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## THE PROPOSED LIGHT ON GAP ROCK.

Concerning the necessity of a light either on Gap Rock or in its vicinity, in order that the southern approach to the port of Hongkong may be rendered safe at night, there can scarcely be two opinions. Indeed we cannot imagine the point could be seriously considered, but as to who should build the lighthouse, who should pay the cost, and where the work should be undertaken, there may be, and are, unfortunately, differences of opinion. These differences of opinion are, however, we believe, by no means insurmountable. The Acting Governor, in his minute on the correspondence between Captain MacEwen, R.N., and Commander MacEwen, R.N., late Acting Harbour Master, on the subject, dismissed the question as follows:—"It is impossible to take this into consideration at the present time, as there are no funds available and other works are much more urgently required." Mr. MacEwen further explained at the meeting of Council on Friday that the Government can do nothing in the matter without referring to the Secretary of State, and that he would address the British Minister at Peking. His communication with Sir Robert Hart on the subject had been informal and unofficial. However, they have served the purpose of showing that the Chinese authorities are prepared to meet the Hongkong Government and co-operate in the work to the extent at least of maintaining the light, when once provided. The next point of course is the source from whence the funds are to come. The Acting Governor is certainly absolutely correct in saying there are no funds available in the Colonial Treasury, but it does not follow that they are not procurable. Had the Hon. A. P. MacEwen been in possession of the fact that he would probably have stated his plan for raising the necessary funds. The light does not need a sum in excess of the amount expended on lights and beacons, and if this balance were expended on its legitimate object, for as three years more sufficient could be raised for the purpose of constructing this much needed light on the Gap Rock. We would always on principle oppose any tax upon shipping, as interfering with the much and rightly prized freedom of the port, but in this instance, we understand, the importance of securing this light to the southern approach to the harbour is so great that more than willing to pay an extra cent a ton for a specified time. We believe this to be Mr. MacEwen's scheme, and it is a sensible and sound one. He would do well to move a definite resolution on the subject at the next meeting, and the Chamber of Commerce should take prompt action in the matter. The proposal of Sir Robert Hart, as a more reasonable, though the last estimate of the cost of the proposed lighthouse (£90,000) seems rather high. If this is the lowest rate at which a first class revolving light can be erected, the second proposition, the Inspector-General would perhaps be the best, namely, that the Hongkong Government should contribute two-thirds of the cost, in which case the light would be ready in 1889. They would then probably be able to provide the funds without borrowing; if they decided to defray the whole cost themselves, it might be necessary to raise a small special loan on the security of the light dues. In any case, seeing that the money required is not an unnecessary amount, there should be no delay in the matter. It is true the port has done without the light for forty odd years, but it is none the less necessary for all that, for its provision would at once put an end to the great loss of time, and therefore money, now incurred through its absence. Captain MacEwen has put the point of the subject very clearly in the light of the correspondence, as follows:—"The want is pressing and will be a long time before the Lighthouse Board will erect one on their own account, as they have so many wants to supply, and easy means can be found to meet the Lighthouse Board. It must be remembered that the cost of every steamer's delay and the inconvenience to the industry of the port, and the loss of the loss of the vessel of any size pressing on at night without a light to guide her, would be more than equivalent to the expense of building the lighthouse." Of course had the Gap Rock been a British territory the lighthouse would long since have been provided, but seeing that the Imperial Government has been ready to undertake it upon, while it has been decided to be conferred solely and exclusively on shipping entering the port of Hongkong, there can be no doubt of the justice of asking the owners of these vessels to contribute towards the erection of the structure, and as like lights, they are willing, no compensation need be paid to the light dues for adding an extra cent to the light dues for short term, with the understanding that it shall not be continued after the expiration of the period specified.

## THE INTERPRETATION IN THE HONGKONG COURTS.

In a colony like Hongkong, where the language used in the courts is not that of the bulk of the population, the question of interpretation is an essential factor in the equal administration of justice. Our judges and magistrates are of superlative abilities, but if the channel through which they receive the evidence given before them be defective they are nevertheless in constant danger of giving wrong decisions. That the interpretation in the Hongkong Courts is not universally satisfactory is an assertion that must be admitted by any one at all conversant with the subject. In the Supreme Court, where Mr. Ball is in charge of the department, there is no room for complaint, but in the Police Court, where a few years ago it was not too much to say that the interpretation was disgraceful, and in the Police Court there is still vast room for improvement. And it should be said that correct interpretation at the Police Court is perhaps even more important than in the Supreme Court itself. In the latter there are usually present lawyers, some of whom understand Chinese themselves, and the lawyers' private interpreters, who can always call attention to any misinterpretation which they think likely to affect the clients' interests, so that the probability of a miscarriage of justice is rendered more remote than in the Police Court, where the interpreter is very often the only person in the court who understands the two languages. The Government seems to be under the impression that there is no dissatisfaction with the existing state of things. This is very far from the fact. In the first place it is believed that the Chinese interpreters, or some of them, are accessible to corruption. We have no facts before us to enable us to pronounce an opinion as to whether this be

so, but we would not wonder if it were so, for we have found on our journey to the fact that it exists, which in itself is a serious matter for the interpreter as well as the magistrate. In any similar case, the magistrate ought to be above suspicion. Some short time ago a clerk in the Magistrate's Court was dismissed, and it is difficult to say at what stage of the service the corruption recently discovered amongst the Chinese constables ceased. It may extend to the interpreters in the Magistrate's or it may not. If it does, and the fact can be proved, no time ought to be lost in making a clean sweep of these officials; if it does not, we can only sympathize with the gentleman concerned on their being the subjects of an unwarranted suspicion, and express the hope that they will have the opportunity afforded them of vindicating their characters before a properly constituted commission. In either case, however, it will be readily conceded that the opportunity of corrupt interpretation would be practically done away with if Europeans were employed at the Police Court, or if one European were placed in charge of the department there to exercise a close supervision over the Chinese interpreters. It is alleged in the correspondence that the Chinese interpreters are incompetent, that they are frequently wrongly put and answers given which do not convey the meaning of the witness. Of course competency in interpretation is a matter of degree. An ordinary house boy may prove himself a perfectly efficient interpreter in conveying a simple Chinese statement, but this is usually about the limit of his capacity. Police Court interpreters, who in the summary way are perfectly efficient, when the examination of a witness is simple and straightforward and yet break down amongst the intricacies of cross-examination, where a perception of the lights and shades of both languages is necessary and subtle distinctions have to be drawn. We believe that the allegation of incompetency there is a considerable amount of truth, and that the interpreters frequently merely catch the main facts of a question or answer, and present them without the qualifications and setting with which their true meaning is inseparably connected. There is undoubtedly a want of confidence felt in the interpretation at the Police Court, quite sufficient to warrant the appointment of the Committee which the Hon. A. P. MacEwen intends to move for at the next meeting of Council. Whether the creation of a special interpretation department, dealing not only with the courts but with the interpretation in all the other departments would be the best way of establishing this interpretation on a better basis is a matter of detail which may be dealt with hereafter. One thing at least is certain. The expensive cadets, who were formerly styled student interpreters, can never, or rarely ever, be used as interpreters. Not one in a score could acquire sufficient mastery of the language in a short time to be able to do so. The material for interpreters exists in the school in the youths who have grown up in the Colony, but who must be given sufficient inducement lead to them to add a knowledge of the written character to their fluency in the colloquial. In the early days of the colony some serious attempt was made to secure really efficient interpretation, but then succeeded the *laissez faire* policy, and with the exception of the appointment of Mr. Ball some seven or eight years ago nothing has since been done by the Government to improve the previously existing state of affairs. The assertions made by the Acting Governor-General in the Council on Friday, that very positive, but we think would break down on cross-examination. It may be asked whether Mr. Ackroyd was speaking only of what had come within his own knowledge or of the whole history of the colony. If the former, his experience only goes back a few years; if the latter, his statements are as inaccurate as much of the correspondence which he spoke of. Mr. Ackroyd says:—"I beg to state that whenever we could obtain Europeans we have done so, and the Government has done every thing it could to get the best interpreters possible. Up to the present we have had no Europeans in the colony who were in any way able to act as interpreters except Mr. Ball." Both these assertions are incorrect. Europeans have done their services, and have been in every way able to act, but their services have not been availed of. If the Committee to be appointed call for all the correspondence which has passed between the Supreme Court and the Government during the last twenty years, we will, we believe, find this statement simply untrue. The Government has done its best to get the best interpreters, but it has not done so. In the Police Court, certainly none at all. The emoluments there are hardly sufficient to attract even the best class of Chinese, except in the case of the First Interpreter. Mr. Ackroyd says further:—"It would perhaps be desirable, if we could get Europeans to do so, and if a suitable competent European would present himself, the Government would very quickly avail itself of his services." We are glad to hear that this is the present view of the Government; it differs utterly from the view it has held in the past judging from its action. The same gentleman says:—"So far as I am concerned, the interpreters at the Police Court have been very good, but the Committee will themselves put the interpreters through a brief written and oral examination in English they will be able to judge of how far this declaration is warranted by the facts. English interpreters might of course prove themselves as deficient in Chinese as the Chinese interpreters are in English, and the admission to the service was obtained only through a very searching examination, which is a point not to be lost sight of. At present we believe there is no examination for interpreters, although there is for most other appointments. A word may be said in connection with the constitution of the Committee. The subject is one with which a Committee composed exclusively of members of Council would probably not be the best able to deal. The Chief Justice should of course be the Chairman, and its members should include one or two of the Heads of Departments most conversant with Chinese, and one or two of the Police Magistrates, and one or two practising solicitors. Such a Committee would probably be able to elaborate a scheme which would place the interpretation in the courts on a permanently satisfactory footing.

## THE ROOKERY AT LAPSAWAN.

Mr. MacEwen's crusade against the Government on behalf of the squatters at Lapsawan has caused no little surprise in the colony. The case was a most of lawless characters, and the only fault that can reasonably be found with the authorities in the matter is that they were too indulgent. Indeed, the squatters might almost be excused if they had come to believe that Government

warnings and threats meant nothing and would never be enforced. In any similar case should arise in the future it would be advisable for the Government, in addition to notifying the people by word of mouth, to post a written proclamation in the place, bearing the proper official seal. The notice given should then be fully executed on the day named, instead of allowing repeated and indefinite extensions of time. As to the character of the population recently gathered together at Lapsawan, it is clearly shown in the correspondence between the Government and the Police report that while the women and children were law-abiding, the men were lawless, and the work hardworking pigs, the greater number of the men wandered about the city in search of plunder, and one particular gang of robbers were living in the village for about nine months, until some of them were arrested. The Afforestation Department also report that great damage has been done to the plantations by the depredations of the squatters. It appears, further, that their camp was in a most insanitary condition, and that they were keeping pigs with impunity, for which they were liable to prosecution. Overyground, therefore, their removal was desirable in the public interest. No injustice can be alleged in the matter, and the Government will be well advised to do nothing to prevent the removal of the camp, but to belong to the colony, but are not from the mainland, who simply availed of the opportunity of establishing themselves in a locality where they thought they could carry on their combined pursuits of pig breeding and robbery with impunity from taxation and supervision. One man, it appears, carried on the manufacture of tooth powder, a business which ought certainly to enable him to pay rates on the same scale as residents generally. Pig-breeding is a useful industry, not to be discouraged where it can be carried on under suitable conditions. It is desirable also that the whole of the small area of cultivable land in the colony should be worked. It does not follow, however, that the squatters are to be allowed to flock into the colony and settle wherever they like with freedom to ignore the requirements of the law as to licenses, etc. On the contrary, seeing that they come from a class which by reason of its poverty is likely to furnish a considerable proportion of criminals, a strict supervision should be maintained over them. As to the squatters at Lapsawan, we believe the respectable Chinese population fully approve of the action taken by the Government, as they hold that the persons evicted belong to a class whom it is by no means desirable to encourage in the colony. Respectable hard-working squatters ought to be well protected by the Government, and it is a room for them and regulations might be so framed that only respectable people would care to accept the conditions, but at Lapsawan ought not to have been tolerated even for the time being. We fully concur with the Acting Governor when he says that the removal of the camp is a most imperative duty, and it would be a most impolitic action to grant them any compensation as *misericordia*. It would inevitably encourage swarms of their countrymen to come over from Kwangtung and do as they have done; settle down on Crown land without permission, and then, when either Government or the people are annoyed by their lawless and disorderly conduct, they would be allowed to disregard all of the laws which they had broken, and would be compensated for removing. The experience gained in connection with the Lapsawan affair will probably put the Government on its guard against allowing any similar nuisance to grow up in the future. The camp was a standing menace to the good order of the colony and to the public health.

## THE ROYAL COMMISSION AND THE SILVER QUESTION.

At last a Royal Commission has been appointed to inquire into the causes of the depreciation of silver. This is one of the most important questions that have come to the front during the present century, and the report of the commission just appointed will be awaited with the keenest interest. The impression has been rapidly gaining ground in England that the long continued depression in trade is due to the depreciation of gold, and the recommendation of Lord Salisbury's Commission that a special Commission should be appointed to inquire into the causes of the depreciation of silver. This is one of the most important questions that have come to the front during the present century, and the report of the commission just appointed will be awaited with the keenest interest. 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